

**Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Meeting  
December 15, 2005 / 10 am to 3:30 pm  
Red Gym at UW-Madison Campus**

Attendees (see separate list)

Intro comments by Tom Huber and introductions by all

Overview of SRTS Legislation and related federal/state budget and program issues –  
Beth Nachreiner, WisDOT Office of Policy, Budget and Finance

Beth provided an overview of the new federal transportation bill SAFETEA-LU, the complicated world of federal and state budgeting and some background on the SRTS program implementation in Wisconsin. There was a long delay with SAFETEA-LU legislation. It was passed about a month after the state budget for 2005-07 was approved. SAFETEA-LU provides spending authority through fiscal year 2009 for 13 formula programs, an increase from 9 in TEA-21. SRTS had strong bi-partisan support from Congressional members and interest groups. The result was the new SRTS program. Wisconsin's share will be based on its share of total national K-8 public school enrollment. This is about 1.5% of the national figure. Funding increases over the life of SAFETEA-LU, starting at about \$1 million in 2005 and increasing up to \$3 million in 2009 for Wisconsin.

An important financial issue is that the Contract Authority (CA) or apportionments in SAFETEA-LU do NOT automatically represent spend-able federal dollars. The annual federal budget process establishes Obligation Authority (OA) limits that typically reduce the amount of funding actually available. For example, Wisconsin received \$680 million on CA but only \$578 m in OA for 2005, about 85.5 cents on the dollar. The result is that programs will end up with apportionment balances that create the appearance of funds on the books that are not spend-able dollars. The question then came up whether WisDOT can favor certain programs over others, e.g., spend more on some programs than others rather than cutting all programs evenly to 85.5% of CA. Beth's response was that this can be done, but characterized it as primarily a state legislative decision. The actual amount that DOT will spend annually on SRTS will likely be negotiated between stakeholders, the Governor, the legislature, and DOT. Another issue is that the various federal projects earmarked in SAFETEA-LU and annual appropriations have to be funded out of Wisconsin's OA.

Beth noted that the WisDOT administration supports the SRTS program in Wisconsin and steps are being taken to hire a full time, federally funded SRTS administration as required by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The paperwork for the position has been sent to the Department of Administration (DOA), though the state's hiring process can take months. Some states are resisting the position requirement. Some other highlights of the SRTS program include:

- Funding for non-infrastructure projects can be set no lower than 10% and no higher than 30%
- Projects should be within 2 miles of a school
- Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> Grade (K-8) is the targeted school population, not high school
- Funding is 100% federal (though probably capped at amount of award)
- SRTS funding does not lapse and cannot be transferred to other federal programs
- FHWA staff noted that federal SRTS guidance is not expected until March 2006 [We later learned that guidance was issued in January 2006.]
- SRTS projects will need to comply with federal regulations under Title 23 as is the case for other federal aid highway programs
- FHWA will allow non-profits to be applicants, but they have to show that they have an accomplished capability to meet Title 23 requirements. [WisDOT can require local sponsors to be local units of government.]

Beth noted another funding complication – how federal funds and programs work within the state’s budget structure. As noted above, SAFETEA-LU was not passed until after the state 2005-07 biennial budget. WisDOT had to make assumptions in the state budget in the absence of complete knowledge about federal programs and funding levels. In addition to the problem of lower actual federal dollars coming to the state, WisDOT has to figure out how to make federal programs work within the existing state budget structure. There is no state budget line item for SRTS. We have to find an existing program to funnel the money through. A likely choice is the Transportation Enhancement program. [The same is the case for various federal earmarks that are “Enhancement-like”.]

There is the issue of how soon Wisconsin can start spending funds on SRTS. Based on how soon we can hire a coordinator, develop a program based on FHWA guidance and solicit, review and select projects to award, it will be fiscal 2007 before we can start committing funds. This will be the third year of the program. There could be an issue of whether the state legislature will allot enough funds in 2007 to account for the accumulated spending authority from 2005 and 2006 plus 2007. Kit Keller noted that interest groups now need to start working with state legislators to make sure the funds will be available. Dar Ward noted that the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin will be lobbying the legislature, WisDOT, and the Governor to maximize the amount of funding for SRTS and to hasten its implementation. The question arose as to how WisDOT will fund the SRTS coordinator out of the SRTS funds that are supposed to pay for the position. WisDOT responded that this is not going to be a problem. Due to its relatively small amount, WisDOT can request from DOA a specific amount to be funneled through an existing program like the Transportation Enhancement program.

Dave Platz of the Federal Highway Administration’s Division Office briefly added several comments to Beth’s presentation. Dave emphasized the need to follow federal requirements for all SRTS projects including National Environmental Protection Act, Davis-Bacon wage requirements, American Disabilities Act, etc. Fund recipients will need to follow the WisDOT “Sponsor Guide” now in use for various other programs.

Federal guidance on the SRTS program will be available in March 2006 [issued January 2006]. A SRTS website has been established by FHWA at: <http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/saferoutes/> (also another national site at <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>).

Panel Discussion – a group of persons with backgrounds implementing their own safe routes to school programs, biking and walking, public health, education, etc. discussed their experiences, lessons learned, things they would do differently. (Many provided handouts.)

*Brad Henderson:* Brad has worked on implementing safe routes programs at three schools in Eau Claire. A local organizing group was formed that includes the Eau Claire police and engineering departments, city-county health department, and the parents-teachers organization. Overall, the school site projects included manuals, maps, surveys, barrier identification, etc. Brad discussed in more detail the efforts at a specific elementary school. Work began with the surveying of parents and getting some sense of from where the kids are traveling. A contract was established that spelled out the activities that the local group would provide to the school and included among other things, a SRTS walking map, an assessment of infrastructure needs, and education tools. Their project has a website: <http://www.safestepsec.org/>.

*Jessica Wineberg:* Jessica is employed by the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin and has been directing the education of students in the Milwaukee Public Schools on safe walking and bicycling practices. This is one component of the district's SRTS program and is part of the district's Neighborhood Initiative. 1,000 students have or will go through the specialized training offered by the BFW and paid for by the pilot program's funds.

*Kit Keller:* Kit has been active in various pedestrian promotions including the Wisconsin Walks program in southeastern Wisconsin. Currently Wisconsin Walks has been involved in the implementation of a SRTS program under the City of Milwaukee's Police Department's direction. Five schools have been identified for focused efforts. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Wisconsin Department of Justice have provided funds for this pilot program. Wisconsin Walks has completed several walking workshops. Other components of the City's SRTS effort include strategic and targeted enforcement around schools and in-class room instruction for students biking and walking to school. The City effort has been coordinated with the Milwaukee School District's SRTS effort.

*Dar Ward* from Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin: Dar would like to see BFW used as a resource to implement SRTS projects. BFW has been active with "bike clubs" at schools. The clubs are designed to encourage biking to school. They have used a 20-point test to measure kids knowledge of bicycling safety. She suggested that these programs benefit from a "champion" at the school. The four "E"s were mentioned as part of a successful program – Education, Encouragement, Engineering, and Enforcement.

*Lisa Bullard-Cawthorne:* The Dane County Safe Communities Coalition has been supporting safe walking to area schools for years. This included the one day, *International Walk our Children to School* day. The Coalition wanted to take the effort several steps forward to encourage safe walking on more than just one day. With a small grant from WisDOT, two schools were identified for intensive intervention. Teaching staff, parents and neighborhood organization people watched drop-off and pick-up practices. A traffic safety plan with a brochure was developed and handed out to school-bound drivers. City of Madison Traffic Engineering developed maps that included safe routes for kids emphasized using crossing areas with adult crossing guards. Lisa also discussed so-called walking school buses where children walk in groups to school for safety purposes.

*Randy Thiel* from WI Department of Public Instruction: Randy indicated that some surveying on the subject had been done in the past but DPI has been reluctant to push one more survey on already survey weary public schools. Schools do have a role for encouraging more walking and bicycling under the student wellness and prevention program. Randy also explained what invokes DPI involvement when a complaint comes in to them stating that there is a hazardous condition for students walking or bicycling to school.

*Deb Pasha* spoke on the state health plan. Eleven priorities are identified in the plan; more biking and walking would be promote three of them. A number of interesting statistics were cited.

- 20-40% of trips in Europe and Canada are “active trips”, meaning people travel under their own power such as biking and walking.
- In the US, it is more like 5%.
- In spite of this, the US has three times as many bike/ped fatalities.
- US medical costs are double the average for these other countries
- Life expectancy is about 2-4 years longer in other developed countries

(Break for Lunch)

Panel finished up discussion noting “lessons learned” and “what we might have done differently”.

*Brad Henderson* felt that they came too late in the school year to be totally effective with their actions. Cautioned to be aware of the timing of the intervention.

*Kit Keller* noted that their project included neighborhood and other local organizations and PTAs. Alders should have been more involved. There is need to institutionalize efforts rather than remain in “pilot project” mode and to involve all age groups. The peaking of parental drop-offs at school tends to be more concentrated for the morning period. The afternoon peak is more dispersed because of the various after school extracurricular activities kids are involved in.

*Dar Ward* commented that SRTS approaches should not be piecemeal and need to go beyond “pilot” status to a point where schools and communities are integrating these approaches as standard practice.

*Jessica* observed that free school busing and auto orientation are major culprits, though admittedly difficult to change. Role models at schools are important and so are multi-year interventions.

*Robbie Weber* discussed new school site designs suggesting that separate bus lanes were necessary and that there be a “cut-out” section for dropping kids off.

There were some observations on what impediments exist to biking and walking. Convenience for parents was a major factor in many cases. Personal security was not as big an issue as would be expected, though ironically it was an issue in Eau Claire even though statistically it rates as a very safe urban area. Roadway safety was more of an issue. Neighborhoods that might rank as “unsafe” may actually have a lot more kids on the street walking home than more prosperous communities where kids are likely to be picked up by parents after school. With a lot of pedestrian traffic near schools, there can be safety in numbers. Some interesting observations were that kids are weighted down with so much stuff in their backpacks and extra items like musical instruments that parents may view it as necessary for the kids to be picked up and dropped off at school.

There was a note of caution about trying to judge SRTS projects when factors vary so much from community to community. There is not a uniform mold for implementing programs. Dennis Hughes (WisDOT employee who also served on a school board for many years) suggested that schools are very interested in teaching to the “standards”. SRTS should be promoted as a way to achieve Physical Ed. standards. It was noted that there is a school conference in Milwaukee in January 2006 where promoting healthy kids will be an issue.

#### Open Discussion by all – what should Wisconsin’s SRTS program look like?

The group moved into a chair circle to facilitate an open, two-way discussion. Some feedback included:

- Use program to leverage other funds since SRTS will be a relatively small pot of money
- Be creative in how you interpret infrastructure, since we will have to spend at least 70% of funds on this category [note that FHWA guidelines may limit this]
- Coordinate SRTS funds with other funding sources such as Hazard Elimination & Safety, NHTSA 402 funds, etc.
- Develop benchmarks, outcome measures for success by 2009 – although others cautioned that it may take years to see measured changes in travel patterns
- Consider small-scale capital improvements such as signage, bike racks and traffic-calming measures in vicinity of schools

- Require match for major capital improvements such as sidewalks even though SRTS is set up as 100% federal funding
- Use “social marketing” as way to segment audiences for the program. Need to “brand” this money for success so legislators will support.
- Develop recognition programs such as “SRTS Star Community”
- Link with other related programs such as DNR’s “Green and Healthy School” program
- Take a look at how the small pool funds for the Hazard Elimination program are used and consider modeling SRTS after that since the funds are relatively easy to use without much red tape.
- Encourage that school districts apply for several schools in its district to bring the minimum request amounts up a reasonable amount.
- Encourage projects that combine infrastructure with “softer” promotional, education, encouragement components
- Develop innovative street crossing projects that may be outside typical design standards (might also be limited by federal state guidelines)
- Develop evaluation criteria for projects that includes what is expected of school before it applies for a SRTS project, e.g., site analysis, evidence of local commitment, support of police department, etc.
- Can you use SRTS funds to support experimental signage studies (to comply with the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices)?
- When SRTS training is offered in school for students, must bring someone in to do this training; can’t expect overwhelmed teachers to handle the training.
- Allow schools to directly apply for projects since they meet the definition of a municipality
- Measuring impacts will be costly, select ways to do this that are creative and to the point – for example, ask if the problems going away.
- Need to make sure that projects are awarded for small communities and school districts.
- Check to see if your county has a Traffic Safety Commission that can be used to help develop the program.
- Share draft Wisconsin’s SRTS draft program materials with attendees and invitees.

## **Concluding Comments**

It was generally agreed that WisDOT would again meet with stakeholders when it is ready to develop guidelines and application materials for implementing Wisconsin’s SRTS program. People who commented on how to divide funds between “soft costs” and infrastructure projects were seemingly much more supportive of spending the maximum amount (30%) on soft costs.